

Teenage Girls by EvieSmallwood

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Summary:

Milkshakes and cat eyes

Lipstick and french fries

Internalize so much, but so little

Don't make us feel belittled, world

or:

El & Max hang out at the arcade. They talk about the present and the future.

Teenage Girls

Author's Note:

Named after the song 'Teenage Girl' by Cherry Glazerr. The first verse is featured in the summary.

I wanted to touch on these two, get a little snapshot of their friendship. Set in the spring of 1986. Hope you enjoy!

"Have you and Lucas gone to second base?"

The question startles Max so much she chokes on her gum. Coughing, she spits the wad out onto the sidewalk and wipes her mouth.

It takes her a minute to comprehend the words fully. "Wh—you didn't...?"

El is eyeing her, one part innocent and the other amused. "I was just wondering," she explains as they approach the arcade. "I heard Stacey Freedman in the locker room the other day talking about how she and Joey did it."

Max opens the door for her. They're greeted by the overpowering smell of popcorn and sweat; *nerd*. It's dark, lit only by the neon letters atop game machines and the screens below.

"Stacey and Joey," Max muses, further leading the way to *Space Invaders*. "God, I never thought she'd go for him."

El hums, leaning against the wall as Max inserts her quarters. "I think he's okay looking," she admits, in that blunt way of hers. "He's just..."

"Not on her level," Max agrees, knowing they're on the same page. They usually are when it comes to these things.

El nods. She blows a pink, glistening bubble. "She said it was nice."

Max furrows her brow, pretending to concentrate on the game. It's

not easy, though. She ends up dying pretty quick. “Fuck,” she breathes. Then she looks back up at El with a raised eyebrow. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” El might be blushing a little, but Max can’t tell. “I don’t think Mike and I are there yet.”

Max doesn’t exactly know what to think; El and Mike have always been slower about the physical stuff (to the point where there really is nothing to speak of at all), but emotionally... they’re way advanced.

She and Lucas are a different story. They bicker a lot, and they break up sometimes, but it never lasts. Their arguments are never serious; they’re just hot-headed and loud. Mrs. Sinclair had once sat Max down and explained that she and Lucas’s father had once been the same way, and now they rarely disagree. She’d said it was like they’d argued out all the small things until they knew exactly how the other felt about everything. So Max had decided to stick with it.

But it isn’t like she has any other choice, or wants to be with anyone else. He’s so sweet, and smart, and funny. Being away from him kind of sucks unless she’s distracted.

“Lucas asked me once,” she admits after a minute, giving the game another go (and this time doing much better). “I said no.”

El only looks a little surprised. She leans forward a little. “When?”

“Like three months ago or something,” she blasts an alien to dust. “He was really shy about it.”

“Why’d you say no?”

She doesn’t sound incredulous, only curious. Maybe she wants ideas for excuses if Mike asks (which Max highly doubts he’ll do). “I don’t know... we’re only fifteen—I mean, I know most people have done it... it just feels different, cuz we’ve almost died and all that.”

El raises her eyebrows. “I thought that made people move faster.”

“I think it gave me perspective,” Max counters. “Savour the small stuff, you know?”

“Yeah,” El smiles. “Can I have a turn?”

“Sure.” Max purposefully lets her lives run out and then switches places with El.

She constantly finds herself marvelling at her friend. She remembers two years ago, when they’d made up at the Snowball dance. El had been really quiet then; her vocabulary limited from years of isolation and neglect (which still pisses Max off). She hadn’t had any understanding, really, of boyfriends or friendship or how the world worked.

Max had fixed that pretty quick. She’d given all sorts of lectures to El, explaining everything she could about anything at all. She’d lent books, helped with homework, and even taught her how to skateboard.

Obviously, El still gets confused at some things, but she’s so smart. Max might be jealous if she weren’t so proud.

“Did Stacey say if it was over the shirt or under?”

She doesn’t even know where the question comes from, she just still can’t believe Stacey of all people is doing that. She’d been a total bitch in eighth grade, but last year she’d totally mellowed out—she’d become a reserved, quiet girl.

Max still hates her for purposely spilling milk all down her favourite blue blouse, though.

El starts to laugh. Her cheeks are very obviously red.

“What?”

“*Under the bra*,” she explains. Max’s eyes widen.

God. “That’s like second base squared,” she breathes, which makes El laugh so hard she gets killed on the game.

“C’mon,” Max says, tugging her giggling friend along. “I need a cigarette.”

She takes her outside and they settle on the curb, legs stretched out over the blacktop. It's getting steadily warmer at night. Max can't wait for summer vacation; campaigns, sleepovers with El, and Steve is coming home from the police academy.

Calling him all the time hardly compares to actually having him here in town with them, taking them out for breakfast and driving them around, pretending they're a grievance.

It won't really be like that anymore, of course. He'll have his job with Chief Hopper. Still, there's spaghetti dinners at his giant always empty house. She can't believe how much she misses his cooking.

El holds out her hand for the cigarette, which Max gives over. El doesn't really smoke; she's uber against Hop doing it, at least. But sometimes, when it feels right, she'll take a drag or two.

"You're so bad," Max teases.

"Shut up," she says. "It's just one."

"Before you know it, you'll be just like your old man; sneaking a smoke after your shift ends—"

"He does that?!"

Max rolls her eyes. "I caught him at it once," she admits, "he put it out as soon as he saw me and gave me ten bucks not to tell."

El laughs. "Joyce is gonna kill him," she says. "She's been dying for a smoke. She'll probably smell it on me."

Max takes the cigarette back. "Just lie and say someone else was. But not me."

"Keith?"

Max cackles at the idea of the Cheeto-chomping asshole actually doing it. "Yeah, sure."

They're quiet. Max finishes off the cigarette on her own, before crushing the stub in the gutter. She tucks her hands in her jacket

pocket. "I can't believe we only have two years left before college," she marvels.

El nods. "I... I've been thinking about that a lot," she admits. "I don't know if I'm gonna go."

Max glances over so quickly she gets whiplash. "*What?! Why not?*"

"It's just—I don't think I'm—"

"I swear to god, El, if you say you're not smart one more fucking time —"

"It's not that," El swallows. "It's *stressful*. I've seen Nancy, and the way she looks when she comes home. She always seems so *tired*."

Max huffs. "Nancy is pre-med," she says.

"So?"

"So they do a shit-ton more than other majors. Look at Jonathan; he's so happy with what he's doing. He even got one of his pieces in that exhibit, remember?"

"Yeah, of course," she replies promptly, the 'he's my *brother*' hanging in the air between them. "But I don't... I don't know what I want to do."

"That's okay. My dad had no clue what he wanted to major in when he went to college, but he still went."

"I thought your dad dropped out."

"Yeah, but he still *went*." Max purses her lips and grabs El's hands in her own. "My point is, if you don't at least try—even for just a semester—you'll always wonder what it would have been like if you'd gone."

"*You're* not going."

"Yeah, but—"

“You’re smarter than me.”

“Oh, bullshit,” Max snaps. Her hostility melts away as El winces. She gently squeezes her friends hands. “Sorry. But it’s not true. My only A is English.”

El opens her mouth to say something else, maybe to argue that she has a B in English (which is totally irrelevant because she has As in everything else). Max keeps talking, determination taking hold. “Listen: it’s always up to you to decide what you want in life, but... maybe in the next couple years you’ll figure out what you want, y’know? Give it time.”

El bites her lip. “What are you gonna do?”

She doesn’t know. She’s thought about trying to get into whatever college Lucas wants to attend, but she knows she won’t be able to. His list consists of Ivy League schools. She has no chance there.

Still, she wants to be near him. Maybe she can get a nice job tutoring kids in English or something. Anything is better than marrying some abusive asshole just because your last husband dropped you, and you’re too afraid to get a job at all.

“I’ll do something,” she says. “It’ll be fine.”

“Hey!”

Their heads snap up. The boys are piling out of Mike’s hand-me-down car, bickering loudly. Mike, as per usual, has eyes only for El.

Max helps her friend up. “It’ll be fine,” she says again.

El nods. “Fine.”

They spend the rest of their evening not worrying; Max lets Lucas wrap his arms around her waist while they watch Dustin cream Will in PAC-Man. He rests his chin on the top of her head, and she knows it’ll be okay. She knows that as long as she’s around him, she’s home.

Author's Note:

These two are so much fun to write, I adore them.
I'm totally willing to make this into a little series if
you guys want!

Let me know what you think :D